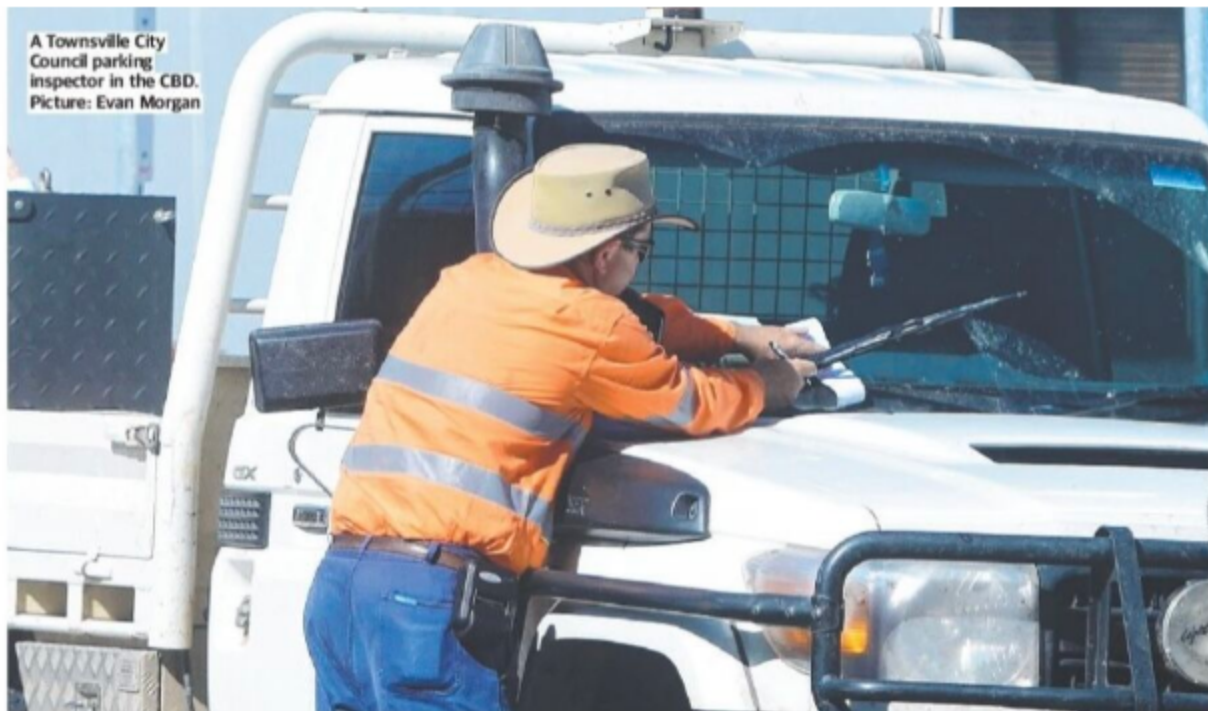


A Townsville City Council parking inspector in the CBD.
Picture: Evan Morgan



City urged to ditch paid parking plan

TONY RAGGATT

TOWNSVILLE City Council is set to spend millions of dollars locking in a paid parking system that deters people from coming to the CBD, residents and businesses warn.

But a council spokesman, who declined to respond to questions on how much the council will spend to install new smart meters, said they believed they had struck the "right balance".

It comes as a Mackay councillor says their free regulated on-street parking is working well and helping to support businesses in its CBD.

Townsville's CBD has been a basket case for years,

with a huge number of vacancies up and down the main street despite more than \$70m spent opening the former mall to traffic in 2011.

Landscape architect and former Mackay resident Simon McConnell said it appeared the council was about to spend millions of dollars locking in a system that would further deter people from coming into the CBD.

He said the council should revert to a system it had previously operated and which Mackay introduced, where on-street parking was regulated but free.

"By having paid parking, you are achieving nothing more than discouraging pri-

vate car use in the CBD. It's contributing to its decline," Mr McConnell said.

Last year Townsville CBD investor National Retail Group called for one-hour free on-street parking to encourage people to return to the CBD.

It was supported by business people including Ray White Commercial principal Graeme Russell and Townsville Chamber of Commerce CEO Ross McLennan but resisted by the council, which denied it was protecting more than \$2.6m in annual parking revenues.

Another local CBD investor, business consultant Michael Kopittke, questioned

whether the council had consulted property owners on the move to smart meters.

"How much is it going to cost and what's the return on investment? The live issue at the moment is the lack of transparency from the council and not just in parking in the CBD," Mr Kopittke said.

Mackay councillor Laurence Bonaventura said they had removed their meters some years ago and introduced free on-street parking, regulated by differing time limits of up to four hours to prevent all-day parking.

Mr Bonaventura said there was a cost to the council but he believed it was acceptable.

"I think it works well. It

gives people the ability to pop into the newsagency and go to the shops," Mr Bonaventura said.

In a statement, a Townsville council spokesman did not respond to questions about how much it planned to spend on the new smart meters but denied it was contributing to high vacancies.

"There are a number of factors outside of council's control that influence occupancy rates of commercial space in the central business district," the spokesman said.

"Council has been working for a number of years to revitalise the CBD and we have (made) and continue to make good progress."